WOMEN4CLIMATE

SAN FRANCISCO

—

CLOSING THE DATA GAP FOR A CYCLING SCHEME

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A CASE STUDY
ON THE USE
OF SAN FRANCISCO
BIKE LANES
(SYNTHESIS)
SUMMER 2018

C40
CITIES

KEY TAKEAWAY

Increasing biking is a key strategy to achieving San Francisco's ambitious climate and sustainability goals: net zero emissions by 2050 and 80% of all trips by sustainable modes (such as biking, walking or transit) by 2030. Currently, only 3.9% of all trips are by bike, significantly less than the 10% projected for 2030 to help the City to achieve the 80% goal.

To increase diversity and inclusion in urban biking, cities must adopt a holistic approach to biking infrastructure that includes investments in both material infrastructure and sociocultural infrastructure. Material infrastructure (protected bike lanes and secure bike parking) is needed to support existing cyclists and encourage novice or less confident cyclists. San Francisco's Transit First policy acknowledges the importance of safe streets, quality bike lanes, and secure bike parking to promote bicycling. However, investments in sociocultural infrastructure (i.e., partnerships with underrepresented communities) are also necessary to challenge gender and cultural biases that keep women and people of color from cycling. Together, material and social infrastructure work in tandem to make biking more inclusive and help San Francisco achieve its mode shift goals.

BACK-GROUND

The C40 Women4Climate initiative strives to empower and inspire the next generation of climate leaders, drive climate action, and raise awareness through research on gender, cities, and climate change to highlight the pivotal role women play in championing climate policies. More than that, the Women4Climate campaign strives to understand how climate action itself must be re-thought to account for gender and wider issues of inclusivity. This case study of women and cycling in San Francisco is one of six case studies that examines how cities can adopt gender-inclusive climate action in policy and practice.

In San Francisco, women are only 29% of cyclists despite being 49% of the population. This gender gap in biking is more nuanced, as women of Asian descent and especially women of Hispanic/Latina descent are underrepresented in biking. This case study examines the gender gap (as well as racial and socioeconomic inequalities) in San Francisco biking. The researchers focused on San Francisco's South of Market District (SoMa), which has received numerous bike lane improvements, and collected data via bike counts, intercept surveys, and pedestrian interviews, as well as focus groups with residents from across the City.

MAIN FINDINGS

Consistent with other US studies, this study found that: (i) White men are disproportionately represented in city biking, (ii) Women bike less and are more likely to bike during off-peak hours for non-work purposes than men, and (iii) Fear of injuries and bike theft are major deterrents to biking for both women and men. Cultural and social factors largely contribute to the underrepresentation of women, Asians, and Hispanic/Latinos in city biking. Overcoming gender and ethnic/racial biases will require investment in partnerships with these communities to complement investments in protected bike lanes and secure bike parking.

_RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

FEMALE USERS OF THE SOMA BIKE LANE

Women cyclists using the SoMa bike lanes ranged in age from 19 to 67 and came from households with incomes ranging from under $20,000 to over $250,000. Over two-thirds of the women cyclists using the SoMa bike lanes bike everyday.

AGE DISPARITIES IN BIKING

Older people, especially women, were more cautious about biking. Older women were particularly concerned about the increased risk of broken bones from falls or collisions.

GENDER DISPARITIES IN BIKING

Gender roles affect when, where, how, and why we travel. Women using the SoMa bike lanes bike to/from work more than men do, but are more likely than men to bike to work outside of peak commuting hours. This means they are not counted in typical biking studies that only report peak period journeys. Moreover, social expectations about dress, grooming, and appearance persist despite the allegedly 'relaxed' attitude predominant in the Bay Area, especially for women. Women who don't bike perceive this as a barrier to biking. To get more women biking, women recommended using social networks, such as social events at which women could try biking in a relaxed environment or buddy systems that pair experienced women cyclists with novices. They also recommended women-led bike training and maintenance/repair classes.

RACIAL DISPARITIES IN BIKING

Asian women and especially Hispanic women are under-represented in biking. Women from these groups commented that biking was largely a young, white, male activity and that 'people like me' don't bike. Addressing these sociocultural barriers to biking will require more targeted outreach to Asian, Latina, and African American groups.

SOCIOECONOMIC DISPARITIES IN BIKING

Cyclists represent a range of income groups. While some may choose biking because it is their most affordable mode of transportation or they are underserved by public transit, for others, it may be a lifestyle choice tied to an ethos of health, personal fitness, and/or environmentalism.

BARRIERS TO BIKING

Safety, heavy traffic, speeding, and hostile drivers are concerns for both men and women, but especially women. Bike theft (and perceptions that the police fail to treat it seriously enough) is another major problem and deterrent to biking for women and men. More secure bike parking at residences, workplaces, and other major destinations, as well as clear signage indicating off-street bike parking locations, is necessary.

BIKE LANES

Both men and women use, prefer, and want more protected bike lanes. They consider protected bike lanes safer and more comfortable than sharrows or marked but unprotected bike lanes. Most people also felt that the inconsistencies in bike lane designs in San Francisco are confusing for cyclists and drivers alike.

RECOM-MENDATIONS

What steps could be taken to increase participation of women and people of color in cycling? This study leads us to the following conclusions and recommendations.

1 MORE PROTECTED BIKE LANES

Continue to expand the network of protected bike lanes and strive for a standard design so that rules of the road are consistent and clear.

2 FORM PARTNERSHIPS

Form partnerships with employers, merchants, schools, and cultural centers to improve bike parking and other facilities that support biking (i.e., lockers, showers, changing rooms). Work with non-governmental organizations to offer assistance with bike selection, bike education, repair classes, and biking buddies/mentors for those new to biking.

3 EDUCATE DRIVERS ABOUT ROAD SHARING

Educate drivers about rules for sharing the road safely, particularly for Transportation Network Compagny drivers (such as Uber and Lyft).

4 INVEST IN BIKE PARKING

In addition to protected bike lanes, investments in secure and clearly signed bike parking throughout the city would support cyclists and encourage more biking. An increase in both accessible public and private bike parking is needed.

5 INCREASE BICYCLE EDUCATION

Increase bicycle education to target and provide more support for women and people of color. The City of San Francisco currently sponsors free bicycle education classes and could expand on those offerings.

6 CHANGE THE NARRATIVE

Change the public narrative from "cyclists are mostly young, fit, white men" to "biking is for everyone" to encourage women and people of color to bike more. Providing more diverse and inclusive imagery of cyclists would be a good start.

7 MOBILIZE COMMUNITIES

Mobilize underrepresented communities to encourage and support fuller participation in the city's biking programs by the entire community.